

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, August 3, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MILK BOTTLE NEWS." Information from the Bureau of Dairy Industry, United States Department of Agriculture. Publication offered: "Preventing Feed Flavors and Odors in Milk," Leaflet 25.

--ooOoo--

Listeners, back in the 1870's and 80's, the milkman was delivering milk in a wooden or metal can with brass hoops and a spigot or a hand dipper. If you were a town housewife at that time, you listened for the milkman's bell and went out to fill your pitcher or milk pail at his brass spigot.

Nobody had heard of delivering milk in individual glass bottles in those days. But at least one man was thinking about it. He was Alex Campbell, a Brooklyn milk dealer, who first tried selling milk in glass jars something like fruit jars with clamp tops. That was in 1878. By 1884 an inventor in Elmira, New York, had gone a step farther and patented what he called the "Commonsense Milk Bottle", very much like our present-day bottles, except that it had a tin top. Though some time passed before towns and cities generally adopted this method of milk delivery, the old insanitary sale of bulk milk was doomed when the glass milk bottle was invented.

For all we know, the glass bottle may also be a back number one of these days if the new paper milk bottle proves a commercial success. A good many milk companies are already using paper containers for wholesale delivery -- to stores, hotels, restaurants, and so on. And the dairy association in one city in Pennsylvania -- Allentown -- has been delivering milk to homes in paper containers for 2 years now.

But so far paper bottles have proved generally more expensive for retail trade than the glass bottles that can be used over and over again. Paper bottles have proved economical for wholesale trade because stores and restaurants are so careless about returning bottles, also because trucks delivering milk in quantity can handle more in paper than in glass with the same manpower. Many milk companies make their paper bottles themselves just before filling them; they form the paper into bottles and then dip it in hot paraffin which sterilizes it just before the milk goes in. According to the New York State Experiment Station, one milk plant in New York City now puts all of its milk in paper containers and reports that its business increased from 160 thousand containers delivered a day in early spring to 250 thousand containers a day during June.

If milk dealers could get away from glass bottles a good many would, just because the return-bottle problem is such a headache to them. And if most people who buy milk realized that getting the bottles back helps keep down the cost of milk, they would be as concerned as the milk dealers. The cost of the bottle, you see, is a big item in what you have to pay for milk. A quart bottle costs originally about 5 cents. Directly or indirectly the housewife or other consumer who buys milk pays for the bottle. But the longer that bottle is used -- the more trips it can make from dealer to consumer, the less the cost to the consumer.

As a matter of fact, housewives are better about returning bottles than stores and soda fountains. But even so, you'll find a lot of women who use the bottles to hold everything from bouquets of flowers to paint brushes. I've even heard of some people -- none of my listeners, of course -- who throw milk bottles away to save the trouble of washing them.

Mr. C. E. Clement of the Bureau of Dairy Industry has investigated the milk bottles that disappear and the ones that come back home and made some interesting findings. He took his facts from 111 milk plants in different States and found that the average life of a milk bottle is 35 trips. Some bottles take only 6 trips and then never return again, while others take as many as 91 trips, but the most common range is from 20 to 30 trips.

Milk dealers have tried all sorts of ways to get bottles back. They've tried paying their milkmen a commission on every bottle returned. That put it up to the milkman to persuade his customers to set out their empty bottles for him. Dealers have also tried charging for all bottles sold by stores. And they've tried milk bottle exchanges. Each of these methods has helped bring lost and wandering bottles back home. Companies using all 3 methods say that the average life of their bottles is 51 trips whereas companies using no system to get bottles back and not being members of an exchange report that their bottles only lasted for 22 trips.

As I said, the more bottles returned to the milk companies, the less the company has to pay for overhead and the cheaper it can sell milk. But getting the bottle back isn't the only way housewives can help dealers keep milk costs down. Getting them back clean also helps. You'd be surprised -- and shocked, too, if you saw the condition of many of the bottles when they get back home. And you'd also be surprised at the expense and labor milk companies have to spend just in cleaning bottles that could just as well have been washed and rinsed with the breakfast dishes. Milk bottles are easy to clean if they go into the dishpan right after emptying or if they are filled with cold water until time for washing dishes. But milk that has dried on the inside of the bottle -- every housewife knows that's difficult to wash out.

Well, so much for milk bottles. Now there's just time for a little brief news about flavors in milk. Listeners often ask what gives milk different or unpleasant flavors. That question requires a long answer. Both what and when the cows eat may affect the taste and odor of the milk and so may the treatment the milk gets from the dairyman and from the housewife. Proper aeration and cooling of the milk has much to do with preventing off flavors. And storing milk in a good home refrigerator -- at 50 degrees or under -- also does much to keep milk tasting best. Most housewives know nowadays that milk bottles always need to be covered in the ice-box. Otherwise the milk will absorb nearby odors. Milk, cream and butter often come out of the ice box tasting of melon, banana, onion, fish, and so on just because they were not protected by a tight cover. As for what and when the cow eats and how these may flavor the milk -- there's a long story, but you can read all about it in a Department of Agriculture Leaflet called "Preventing Feed Flavors and Odors in Milk," Leaflet No. 25. This is a free publication from the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D. C.

#####

